



International Division  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

## International Safety and Security Director (ISSD) Considerations to Help You Plan International Travel Updated: July 2023

### Introduction

When planning an international learning experience, UW-Madison recommends incorporating safety and security into the planning process from the beginning—when initial steps are taken to identify a destination(s) for the educational experience. Risk is of course present in almost any location—both here at home and around the world—but an “undue degree” of risk should not be an inherent part of any learning experience undertaken by students, faculty, or staff.

The term “undue degree” is vague, but for the university’s purpose, is taken to mean travel to a location that is under an elevated U.S. Department of State or CDC travel warning. Under UW-Madison’s [International Travel Policy](#), **students** are precluded from traveling to any location that remains under a [U.S. Department of State](#) Level 3 or Level 4 advisory or a [CDC Travel Health](#) Notice of Level 3 or Level 4. The policy and guidelines also highly discourage faculty and staff travel to those same locations. Individuals students or groups with students seeking to travel to or through a location under an elevated travel warning may [request a waiver](#) of the policy via a formal process. This waiver request will be reviewed and considered by the University International Travel Committee (UITC). By seeking a waiver to the policy, the requestor is proposing that the program of study or other educational purpose can be completed, and learning achieved without encountering the hazards addressed by the travel warning. The waiver request procedure is described in a document entitled “[Travel Warning Waiver Request Form](#)”—available on the [UW-Madison International Safety and Security](#) website and from campus study abroad program offices.

Whether the contemplated destination is under an elevated travel warning or not, it is a proven best practice to plan for the inherent risks of international travel in a knowledgeable and deliberate manner. The “knowledge” part comes from a combination of information and experience in a particular region or location. Information for planning can be accessed in several ways, many of which are accessible online and linked on the [UW-Madison International Safety and Security](#) website. Travelers' can also use “experience” in their planning, gained personally or from those who have already traveled in the region, country, or locale to which they or their group plan to travel. Talk to experienced travelers, learn from them, and ask several of the questions suggested in this guide. Remember that many of the linked resources available to you are similarly built on experiences—albeit information drawn from the combined experiences of great numbers of travelers.

This document is organized in two distinct parts: first, it presents several questions that will prompt consideration of the way that each trip is planned and executed. As you plan your travel and incorporate safety and security considerations into your itinerary, ask yourself these questions and [let them guide your planning](#). The second part of this document is an indexed [risk management worksheet](#). This tool provides a simple self-assessment that may indicate the need for a more objective outside safety and security assessment of your trip, even for areas that are not under an elevated travel warning. It may also indicate that the planned trip may not be as safe and secure as you might hope—remember, the risks of international experiences must be managed to remain in balance with the great learning opportunities they offer. Apply



the tool in a frank objective manner to help better understand where your planned trip might require more careful consideration to ensure its learning success—and avoid a potential tragedy.

If you have safety and security questions, would like help finding someone who may have traveled previously to your destination, or have suggestions on how this resource document might be improved, please [contact](#) the International Safety and Security Director's office at [ISSDInformation@wisc.edu](mailto:ISSDInformation@wisc.edu).

### Questions to Guide Planning

The questions below are offered to help identify your trip's balance between educational opportunity and risk or the gaps that exist in attempts to reach that balance. **For the purposes of this document, risk is defined as an element of heightened threat to travelers due to the physical threat of petty or violent crimes; the presence and activity of terrorist groups; dangerous travel means (taxi, bus, train, regional airline, etc.) either to or within the destination; lack of local infrastructure; sanitation or health concerns; or the lack of medical resources.** Notice that some of the questions below are specific to group travel while others may be more appropriate for individual travel. Translate the intention of the question to your own circumstance. Use these questions to review your program thoughtfully and work to build the trip so that the questions can be answered with confidence prior to traveling.

**Overall Itinerary and Planning:** The first overarching question to ask is whether the destination is a location in which specific or unique learning outcomes can be achieved with some elemental experience or resource that cannot be realized similarly at another location—perhaps one with lower risk. If so, at least consider re-planning the program to another destination—**remember risk is present everywhere, but heightened or undue risk is NOT a necessary or enriching ingredient for experiential education.**

- Are there changes to the itinerary that may mitigate risk without removing or diluting learning experiences in a manner that begins to erode the intended outcome?
- Are trips to public places and locations that might represent increased risk taken during non-peak times of public visit to the greatest extent practicable?
- Are there negative local perceptions of the United States, American citizens, or other foreign governments and their citizens? Could these local perceptions of travelers from a U.S. university?
- Have you coordinated plans with recognized local providers or agencies of long-standing success that specifically consider and accommodate safety and security practices in the expected environment? (Some countries' tourist bureaus or similar agencies will keep a list of recognized and even registered providers who offer a standard of care and diligence – search online for information on how to contact your destination's country's embassy in the United States or even a nearby consulate office for help finding such information.)
- What types of natural disasters are known to occur at your destination(s) (e.g., earthquakes, typhoons, flooding, wildfires, etc)? Are you traveling at a time when these disasters may occur more frequently than normal or during their annual season (e.g., rainy or monsoon season, typhoon season, periods of drought)? Can you take measures to mitigate risks from these disasters?
- Is there an identified plan to accommodate the learning itinerary if any member of the group falls ill



or is injured? (This should include an identified secondary leader(s) with knowledge of the program's communications, planning, and execution and an awareness of health and medical resources at each primary location in the itinerary.)

- Have you developed an emergency plan at each overnight location on your itinerary in concert with in-country hosts or agencies/providers so that you and/or your group will know what to do and how to find help if needed? (e.g., the location of a local police department, a host-country national agency or U.S. or allied consulate, the offices of a recognized non-governmental organization or agency or a major local hospital or large medical clinic)
- Have all travelers scanned their passports and visas and e-mailed these to a personal e-mail or cloud account that will allow them or a trusted family member easy access in case a passport is lost, destroyed, or stolen while traveling? Having the passport information readily available will help you request a replacement through a consulate or embassy while in a foreign country. For information on your destination's visa requirements, go to the individual country page on the Department of State's [country information site](#).

### **Communications:**

- Generally, have communications both within the travel group and with UW- Madison and other emergency contacts been considered and accommodated by planning?
- Is there a communications plan that accommodates necessary coordination during daily activity, unexpected changes, and potential emergencies or crises? This should allow in-country communications between members of a group and from the group to public agencies and the US embassy or consulate as well as communications internationally with UW-Madison and other points of emergency contact.
- Are communications layered so that the removal of one resource (e.g., a single cellular telephone contact) does not isolate the group or any of its members? (This may take the form of homestays being within short walking distances of one another; internet accessibility in hostels or homestay residences; third-party providers' company communications plans, etc.)
- UW-Madison highly encourages all U.S. citizens to enroll in the Dept of State's STEP program for their destination. Non-U.S. citizens traveling abroad under UW-Madison auspices are similarly encouraged to contact their own country's embassy in the destination country to let them know they are there and how they might be contacted if circumstances dictate. (STEP is a resource that offers participants digital updates on changing circumstances at their location including conditions impacted by violence, natural catastrophes, and health concerns among other elements.) Enroll in STEP by visiting the Dept of State's program site: <https://step.state.gov/step/>.
- Have you identified a process by which timely contact will be maintained with UW- Madison throughout your itinerary? (This should include both someone in your organization—e.g., a program coordinator, dept chair, or faculty advisor—and others at UW-Madison who can offer you support in the case of an emergency—such as the coordinating study abroad office or the ISSD.) Try to identify a degree of planned redundancy in your communications if possible—e.g., cellular

phone and internet, cellular phone numbers for both the trip leader and a landline telephone number for a responsible third-party provider, etc).

### **Travel:**

- Do members of the group arrive at the destination together or separately? If separately, are there detailed plans to marshal the group in a safe manner that does not rely on ad hoc taxi services or extended waits in public places?
- Have you considered alternate plans for local transportation if there are unforeseen delays in commercial air or rail travel that shift arrival times to the middle of the night? Typically, nighttime arrivals in any destination will increase risk for travelers as crime rates increase and ground travel becomes more hazardous.
- Is travel undertaken with recognized agencies or providers that do not unnecessarily expose the group to risk or rely on unknown or shared public resources? For instance, if you intend to rent a taxi, have received a list of known safe taxi companies from the US embassy or a trusted host or third-party provider in-country?
- Are in-country travel plans redundant to accommodate unexpected challenges such as mechanical breakdowns, flat tires, etc.? (A minimum of two vehicles per group is a standard best practice from a safety and security perspective—the ability to simply crowd into the remaining vehicle if one breaks down in a rural area is well worth the added cost versus waiting for help for what might be hours—but more than two may attract undue attention and create an attractive target to organized criminal or even terrorist groups.)

### **Public Resources and Infrastructure:**

- What is the local perception of the United States government? Could the relationship between the local government and the U.S. government (or its closely allied countries) put travelers at greater risk, or could it impact the U.S. Embassy's ability to provide timely assistance?
- Are local roads and highways going to support the rate of travel at which you've planned your itinerary—or will it take you several hours to travel a distance that in a more developed country would only take an hour or two? This circumstance is common and would demand that you plan for safe stopover lodging rather than travel at night or arrive at a destination much later in the night than might be safe or desired.
- Is there a major medical hospital in the country within reasonable transportation distance if someone in your group falls extremely ill or is injured in a manner that requires immediate skilled and resourced attention? (If not accessible quickly--e.g., within one hour--by road at your location, is there timely emergency air service available to a capable hospital in case of an injury that threatens life or limb?)
- Is the quality of medical care commensurate with your needs and expectations if a member of your group is injured, falls extremely ill, or requires unforeseen acute care? If not, remember that you

may need to identify an alternate plan in case you have a need for timely quality medical care (e.g., a return to a neighboring country where there is quality care and/or a hospital or large clinic at which your international insurance policy is accepted as payment).

- Have you worked with your in-country host (or other resources) to identify local medical clinics and ascertained available care (not only for acute needs due to severe illness or injury, but also for minor required care—such as for minor illness, lacerations, or fractures)?
- Is rail travel available on segments of your intended route or between destination stops that might be a more secure alternative to travel by bus or other motor vehicle?

### **International Risk Management Score**

Using the below worksheet, try to frankly assess your own planned trip by answering the questions and applying a numerical value to your answer using the points in the right-hand column. This is admittedly subjective but doesn't dilute the value of the exercise: the Risk Management Score worksheet simply attempts to help you assess the risk associated with your planned trip through a quantified framework.

When you have answered all the questions, total these numbers into a single composite score. This is your International Risk Management score—or IRM. The IRM score will place your planned trip into a range of potential risks illustrated on the spectrum found at the bottom of the matrix.

- If the total score characterizes your trip as “significant risk,” then review your planning and attempt to make meaningful changes that mitigate risk where the scores drive your total into that range. It may not be possible to avoid risk entirely but even the awareness that it exists will tend to heighten your attention to your surroundings and environment with a positive influence on your safety and security.
- If the total score characterizes your trip as “high risk,” then it is strongly recommended that you make significant changes to your itinerary to mitigate risk – and even review the entire purpose for the trip and its balance with intended learning outcomes and experiences.
- It is suggested that the trip be reviewed by someone who is not involved with it otherwise and who also has significant experience in international education. An external observer may review the trip with greater objectivity and help highlight areas of concern or improvement. The UW-Madison International Safety and Security Director (ISSD) may be asked to provide this sort of review and will offer advice on reducing the trip's risk.

### **Assumptions:**

- Your group will have enrolled in UW-Madison's [international health and travel insurance](#).
- Your group will present a pre-departure orientation at which safety, security, and health concerns are discussed in addition to cultural considerations and standards of conduct.
- You and members of group have enrolled in the State Department's [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#).
- You have created a [basic emergency plan](#) that is shared with the entire group.
- You have created a communications plan and contact information that is given to the group.



### International Risk Management Worksheet

<b>Travel Itinerary</b>	Does the travel itinerary take you into an area with an elevated travel warning (State Department Level 3 (Reconsider Travel) or above)? If so, add ten points. US Dept of State Travel Advisories: <a href="http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/alertswarnings.html">http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/alertswarnings.html</a>	(10 pts)
	Does the local government have negative relationship with the U.S. government and could that relationship cause increased risk for travelers or limit the U.S. Embassy’s ability to provide assistance. If yes, add three to five points based on your assessment of the degree to which this might prevent undermine your access in time of need given the conditions.	(3-5 pts)
	Is there clear and evident anti-western sentiment in the country and could that put travelers from a U.S. university at increased bystander risk? If yes, add four points.	(5 pts)
	Are natural disasters common in any of your locations of travel? If so, do local authorities have the capabilities to provide early warning and appropriate emergency response? If so, add three to five points based on your assessment of the risk and its potential impact on your travel.	(3-5)
	Do all the members arrive in the destination country and at each location together? If not, add three points.	(3 pts)
	Does your itinerary include more than two modes of travel on the way to the destination (e.g., air, bus, taxi, train)? If so, add three points.	(3 pts)
	Does your travel include one or more legs on a regional airline other than in the United States, Canada, or Western Europe? If so, add two points.	(2 pts)
	Once in-country, does your travel rely on publicly procured transportation such as a public taxi or bus service that is not prearranged? If so, add three points.	(3 pts)
	Is a recognized or registered local provider or in-country host agency <u>heavily</u> involved in your planning and trip execution? If not, add four points.	(4 pts)
	Is a significant proportion of your itinerary at public sites or institutions with public access (i.e. historic sites, museums, sporting events, university conferences, etc.)? If so, add five points.	(5 pts)





	Is a portion of your travel through rural areas with limited emergency/recovery services, cell/data dead spots, and poor or unimproved roads? If so, add three to five points based on your assessment of the risk.	(3-5 pts)
	Does your travel rely on a single vehicle for your entire group during any significant portion of the itinerary? If so, add three points.	(3 pts)
<b>Communication</b>	Will all or most members of the group have immediate access to a cell phone with an active international calling plan? At least enough so that each room or homestay has a working cell phone. If not, add three points.	(3 pts)
	Will there be any part of the itinerary when the group is separated by design (not including different rooms at the same hotel, dormitory, or hostel)—this includes different work sites, different homestays (even within the same village or at the same general location), dorms in different buildings, etc.? If so, add three points.	(3 pts)
	Will you have internet and/or cellphone data access throughout the itinerary? If not, add two points.	(2 pts)
	Will you have access to a cellphone signal throughout the itinerary for voice calls or SMS messaging? Meaning that a signal is available most of the time at any planned location—this is a question that can be asked of your in-country hosts or even the US embassy or consulate. If not, add four points.	(4 pts)

<b>Medical and Health Resources</b>	Are there capable hospitals within a reasonable distance of each location on your itinerary in case of trauma or illness? The term “reasonable” here will depend on your location and available transportation—one hour by vehicle is probably a good rule to help you define “reasonable” for this purpose. If not, add three to five points based on the degree of capability that you believe is lacking within a reasonable distance for access.	(3-5 pts)
	Are local medical clinics available in the rural areas in which you intend to travel that have the capability to treat minor illnesses, fractures, sprains, etc.? If not, add four points.	(4 pts)
	Is there an elevated CDC health notice for any location on your itinerary? If so, add seven points. CDC: <a href="http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices">http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices</a>	(7 pts)



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	Is there an activity of any kind planned during your itinerary that even under conditions at home would be considered “risky” – (rock climbing, single-track mountain biking, hiking over rocky terrain on unimproved trails, etc.)? If so, add five points.	(5 pts)
	Is clean drinking water readily available (tap, bottled, or otherwise—e.g., you must plan to take your own through large portions of your itinerary)? If not, add two points	(2 pts)
<b>TOTAL</b>		(87 pts max possible)

Low Risk (1 – 10 pts)	Acceptable Risk (11 – 20 pts)	Significant Risk (21 – 30 pts)	High Risk (31 + pts)
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